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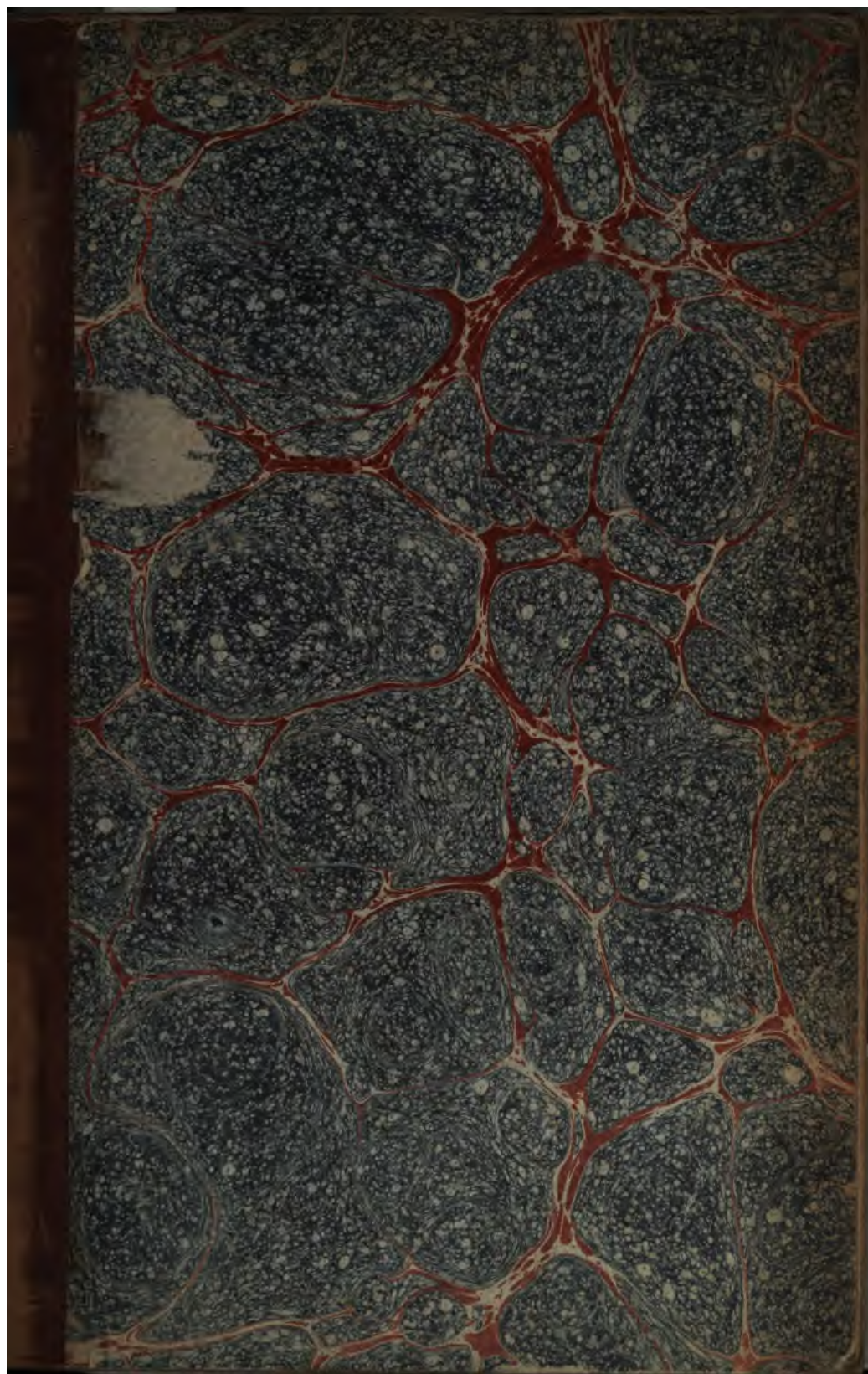
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**PASTORAL LETTER,**

TO

**THE CLERGY AND MEMBERS**

OF THE

**Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States of America.**

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**M DCCC XXXV.**

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*1835. 831.*



A

**P A S T O R A L   L E T T E R,**

TO

**THE CLERGY AND MEMBERS**

OF THE

**PROTESTANT EPISCOPAL CHURCH**

IN THE

**United States of America,**

**FROM THE BISHOPS OF THE SAME, ASSEMBLED IN GENERAL CONVENTION, IN THE  
CITY OF PHILADELPHIA, AUGUST, 1835.**

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**NEW-YORK:**

**PRINTED AT THE PROTESTANT EPISCOPAL PRESS,  
No. 46 Lumber-street.**

**1835.**

831



**Extract from Canon LI. of the General Convention of 1832, which provides for the publishing of the Pastoral Letters of the House of Bishops.**

**“It is hereby made the duty of every clergyman having a pastoral charge, when any such Letter is published, to read the said Pastoral Letter to his congregation, on some occasion of public worship.”**



A

**PASTORAL LETTER,**  
**TO THE CLERGY AND MEMBERS OF**  
**THE PROTESTANT EPISCOPAL CHURCH**  
**IN THE UNITED STATES.**

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**BRETHREN:—**We once more address you in a Pastoral Letter, from a triennial meeting of our body. It is an occasion on which we cannot be assembled without having our attention drawn to the fact, that we are within a few days of the period when there assembled in this city the first General Convention for the organizing of our Church, after Conventions in different dioceses. It was a work attended by many difficulties, at last happily overcome: an issue encouraging the hope, now, after the intervening of the half of a century, that it is an instance of the verifying of the promise of the divine Head of the Church, of his being with her to the end of the world.

In the course of the present session, the attention of the Convention was occupied by some important subjects. The most prominent of them shall be here exhibited; and it is to be hoped, that their proceedings thereon will tend to the stability and to the increase of the Church, proportioned to the singular measure of unanimity with which they were conducted.

The Church in the State of Illinois has been admitted into our ecclesiastical union. They are not competent, according to the Canons, to the choice of a bishop for consecration; but, having chosen for their bishop the Right Rev. Philander Chase, D. D., who had resigned his episcopacy in the Diocese of Ohio, they were admitted, with their bishop, into the aggregate body.

To the Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society there has been given a new form; of which the principal features are—the vesting of the paramount direction in the General Convention; their acting through the intermediate agency of a Board of Missions chosen by them; and the separating of the two departments, in each of which there is to be a committee for the accomplishing of its objects.

The state of the Theological Seminary has been before the Convention; and while they perceived cause of entire satisfaction with the conducting as well of its pecuniary as of its literary concerns, they are gratified by the evidence manifested of its usefulness, in the liberal donations bestowed on it, and in the continually increasing number of its students.

There was brought before the Convention, a question tending to the permitting of the division of dioceses, under certain circumstances. It appearing to both Houses, that such an expedient may become necessary from the increase of Episcopal population in the large dioceses, provision was made for the object.

The Convention empowered certain clergymen, conversant in the German language, to prepare and set forth in the same a translation of the Liturgy.

There has been recommended to our congregations, a more ritual practice than is now apparent, of certain parts of the Liturgy, in which the people are required to join with the minister.

A few Canons were passed; some of which are additions to those already in force, and others for the alterations of the latter in points on which experience has dictated the utility of changes.

A very important addition to the Canons, is the authorizing of the consecration of missionary bishops for those portions of the United States, in which the Church has not yet been organized. To this has been added another provision, for the extending of the episcopacy to other countries, in which the Gospel is as yet unknown.

There were other measures during the session, for which we think it sufficient to refer to the Journal.

Between the last General Convention and the present, there have been some incidents of considerable interest. In January, 1834, there took place the consecration of the Rev. James H. Otey, D. D., for the Diocese of Tennessee. In that State there was not a church, nor the vestige of a congregation, until the introduction of our liturgy into it by their present bishop, when he began his labors there in the character of a deacon. That it should so soon contain an Episcopal population, entitling to the choice of a bishop, is a remarkable fact, not to be noticed without the commendation due to the zeal and the labors which, under the blessing of God, have accomplished so extensive a work.

The Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society have done much, through the medium of their Executive Committee. Besides their aid afforded to sundry missionaries, who have been forming new congregations in sundry districts of the Union, they have supported two very expensive establishments, noticed in our former pastoral letters; one of them in Greece, and the other at Green Bay. There is the less need to be circumstantial in the detail of the present state of these establishments, and of the proceedings relative to them, as they are matters presented in various shapes to the notice of all inquiring members of our communion. It will be more important to record the great effort, which, under the instructions of the Society, the Executive Committee have lately put forth for the sending of two missionaries to China. It is generally known, that for some ages past, there has been the most vigilant attention of the court of Pekin, against the introduction of the Gospel among the millions of the inhabitants of what is called "the Celestial Empire." From late accounts well authenticated, it appears that the prejudice has subsided; that the sound of the Gospel is heard without hindrance, in the provinces bordering on the ocean; and that it has even penetrated to the interior. Who can tell whether this may not be a link in that chain of divine providence, which shall assuredly end in the fulfilment of the promise: "All the kingdoms of the world shall become the kingdoms of the LORD and of his CHRIST." The two young brethren who have engaged with self-devotedness on the mission, had received their theological education, one of them at the General Seminary in New-York; and the other in that of Alexandria, under the Diocese of Virginia. In consideration of the purity of their motives, we trust that they have been suggestions of the HOLY SPIRIT; and we solicit for them the prayers of the members of our Church, throughout the Union.

Besides what has been already said of the General Theological Seminary, it has continued to send out annually well-educated sons, prepared for the field of gospel labor. The increase of the number of its pupils has been a call for an additional building, which the trustees are accordingly erecting. The funds do not yet amount to what is required for its support; so that there continues the necessity of annual collections for it in the different dioceses.

The General Sunday School Union, although increasing in the number of its auxiliaries, is too far short of a comprehension of the whole of the local schools. Perhaps it is owing to the want of attention to the subject, which is to be regretted, because it presents an organization, the best calculated to resist the efforts perseveringly made for the withdrawing of our Sunday schools from the pastoral superintendence of their respective churches.

It will be understood that this survey is of institutions proper to the general Church; all efforts of a diocesan character being left to the records of the appropriate journals.

Brethren, it has been the practice of the bishops, that in each of their triennial addresses, they have taken occasion to call your attention to some point or points characteristic of our Church; and attention to which is especially invited by existing circumstances. This course shall be now continued.

It has been a question how far, in the estimation of the Church of England, and of course of her daughter in the United States, the works of the fathers are to be resorted to, for the ascertaining of Christian doctrine, discipline and worship. Those two Churches are explicit in the declaration of their belief, that the Scriptures are the only standard of divine truth; yet, in the preface to their ordinal, in their articles, and more copiously in their homilies, those ancient fathers are referred to, as having weight on the points to which they are applied. What clothes the subject with especial importance is this; while there is set up the claim of submission to a foreign Church, on the ground of tradition through the fathers, of all the communions differing from that Church and from our own; there are not any, who, in their public standards, have recourse to the here advocated testimony, for aid in attaining to divine truth.

So unequivocal and so often repeated, and this with especial stress laid on the doctrine, is our belief of the sufficiency of the books of inspiration, that the only reason for the calling in of that exterior aid, must be its administering to interpretation; in like manner as in civil concerns, this object is effected by the knowledge of coincident opinions, customs and events, certified by present and by succeeding times. Without reference to such authority, there are many passages of Scripture from which no reasonable sense can be educed.

This ground is merely an enlargement of that taken by us, in

ascertaining what should be received as the canonical books of Scripture. Our articles declare the Church to be "the witness and the keeper of Holy Writ." She is the traditionary witness of books published to the world, as from the pens of the several persons whose names they bear; and she is the keeper of them for the prevention of forgery, or of any other species of imposition. This is the only defensible ground, for the affirming of the integrity of the sacred volume; and it cannot be surrendered without a committing of the subject to the judgments or to the tastes of fallible men, in one shape or in another. Our Church differs from the opinion entertained by some, that a divine character is so impressed on every book, as to be itself evidence of inspiration. Historic testimony was the guide of the early fathers, in their establishing of the Canon.

Lest even the deriving of this moderate help from the fathers should seem to be a detraction from the authority of holy Scripture, it will be to the purpose to cite a few of their testimonies in favor of its sufficiency.

In the age immediately after that of the Apostles, it is said by Justin Martyr, in his dialogue with Trypho, a Jew: "Attend to what I shall recite out of the holy Scriptures;" which is opposed to what the Jew had alleged on the ground of tradition.

In the next age, St. Irenæus says, in his work against the heretics, "The method of our salvation, we have known from those men by whom the Gospel came to us, which then they preached, but afterward, by the will of God, delivered to us in the Scriptures, to be the foundation and the pillar of our faith."\*

In the third century, toward the middle of it, St. Cyprian being opposed by an argument from tradition, demands, "Whence have

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\* It has been held very important, to procure the testimony of so early a father as Irenæus to the co-ordinate authority of tradition. Two passages are quoted from him; and the irrelevancy of them is proof of the opposite senses. In one of them, he intimates, that if the Apostles had left no Scriptures, we ought to recur to tradition; implying, that being in possession of the former, we should hold the latter not essential. In the other passage, the father, in opposition to the plea of the Valentinian heretics, grounded on the obscure tradition of their sect, opposes to it the more respectable tradition of the then pure Church of Rome, founded by St. Peter and St. Paul. By quoting a part only of the argument, and by the change of "undique" [on all sides] into "ubique," [every where,] there has been fastened on the passage a sense not thought of by the father.

you that tradition? Comes it from the authority of the LORD and of the Gospel, or from the epistles of the Apostles? For God testifies that we are to do those things which are written."

In the next age, St. Austin calls Scripture "the divine balance, for the weighing of doctrine;" and he says, "All things which appertain to life and doctrine, are plainly set down in Scripture."

To go no further than to the next century, we there find in St. Jerome: "Of those things which without the authorities and the testimonies of Scripture, men invent of their own heads, as from apostolical tradition, they are smitten with the sword of God."

From the mass of authorities to the same effect, these few have been selected. It is incorrect, when, to elevate tradition to a co-ordinate rank with Scripture, there is put out of view, that the latter rule is not uncommonly included under the former. When St. Paul, in his journey through several cities, "*delivered* them the decrees to keep;" when he said, "That which I received of the LORD I *delivered* to you;" the original word would have been as well rendered "*tradited*," had this been a word in common use. Under the same remark there comes the word "traditions," and "tradition," in 2 Thess. ii. 15, and iii. 6. Agreeably to this use in Scripture itself, admitting of a limited or of a more extended sense, there falls the word as used by the early fathers.

These considerations are presented, in order to show that we do not surrender the point of the sufficiency of Scripture, when, in so doing, we should act in contrariety to the sense of those fathers whose opinions are exalted by some, as constituting an authority equal to that of Holy Writ, and equally a rule of faith. But this hinders not that they may faithfully report the fact of there having been held this or the other opinion, by the Christians of their respective times. It is no more than the credit which we should give to certain heathen historians, as to Pliny or to Tacitus, in relation to some facts in the concerns of the Church, falling under their several notices.

After being guarded against the imputation of the disparagement of Scripture, let there be a transition to the advantages gained to the Church of England, and to the Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States, by admission of the testimonies of the fathers, in the qualified sense which has been defined.

1st. It establishes the distinction which those Churches take between what they acknowledge to be the canonical books of Scripture, to the exclusion from the canon of others which have not the like stamp of authority. We contend, as already stated, that recourse must be had to tradition for the simple fact that this or the other book has been handed down as the work of the person whose name it bears, in like manner as the records of a court are transmitted from generation to generation, and held to be faithful entries of the doings of intervening times. It is not alleged, that in the first three centuries, there is notice of any of the books called the Apocrypha. In the succeeding ages, when those books are mentioned by any of the fathers, it is as of a grade inferior to that of those which we receive as canonical. For this it may be sufficient to cite the authority of St. Jerome, who wrote toward the end of the 4th century, and who says of them: "The Church reads them, indeed, but does not receive them among the canonical books of Scripture." What has contributed materially to the opposite and erroneous opinion, is the circumstance already stated, that the fathers occasionally make use of the word "tradition," in the sense of its embracing of holy Scripture. As to our Church, it is well known that she discriminates between the books held to be inspired by the Spirit of God, and the books of the Apocrypha, permitted by her to be read, "for instruction in life and manners." It is a very important distinction, and is much confirmed in contrarieties of views introduced into the Church several ages after that of the Apostles.

2dly. Another advantage which the Church derives from the same source, is the additional evidence which it brings to the determinations of the two creeds; especially in reference to their exhibition of the doctrine of the sacred Three in the Divine nature—FATHER, SON and HOLY SPIRIT. Although they are recognised in the short form of the Apostles' Creed, yet against each of the three were the assaults of error, to the injury of the faith of some. One class of heretics, under the name of Sabellianism, contradicted the paternity. Other species of them annihilated the character of the Son; either on the one hand, degrading it to that of mere man, or at most of a superangelic nature, originated in time—for such were the Ebionites and the Arians; or on the other hand, pretending to do honor to the divinity, by merging



in it the humanity; for such was the folly of the Docetæ. And in respect to the HOLY SPIRIT, there was, by the Macedonians, the pretence of his recent descent, superseding that on the day of Pentecost, and communicating a more perfect dispensation. These heresies were resisted by a succession of men who were known to speak the sense of the universal Church, and whose works have been transmitted to us. Succeeding times have reproduced these heresies. Does it not then contribute to security, that there may be found a preservative from the poison of them in the documents referred to? The Church of England, under the security of Divine protection, has kept close to the integrity of revealed truth; while denominations formerly consenting with her, have departed from their united testimony, in some instances to the verge of infidelity. Who can tell to what extent the error has been occasioned by a light esteem of what was held universally by Christians, immediately after the age of the Apostles?

3dly. There is the benefit derived to our Church from her qualified use of the fathers, that she disengages herself from all concern in the many questions which modern theology has made the subjects of much controversy, involving some matters which do not seem to have been known to the early ages, in the shape either of truth or of error. The writings of the fathers of those ages, tend to the confirmation of such truths of holy Scripture as come under the name of the doctrines of grace. But in after times, by the extension of the sphere of metaphysics in the province of theology, the mixture gave rise to many controversies, on which there is such silence of the fathers of the first three centuries, that if the matters contended for were Christian doctrine, they must have ceased to be operative from the days of the Apostles, until revived, at the distance from them of more than three hundred years. This would be contrary to what we know of human nature, and of the history of opinion in any department. It cannot be denied of some of the fathers of the fourth and fifth centuries, that in their laudable resistance of innovating doctrines, they precipitated themselves into contrarieties not found in Scripture; and not exhibiting a ground on which reason can exercise its powers with certainty. If such matters were unknown to the fathers of the first three centuries, it is a reason for the considering of them as uninteresting at the present day. While we are thus taught to

give weight to the opinions of the fathers, in some measure proportioned to the nearness of them severally to the source of truth; we find the benefit of the distinction to our Church, in her silence on points affirmed by some denominations to be of the utmost importance to a genuine profession.

Under this head, it will not be irrelative to remark, that we raise a barrier against all the notions which have lately been obtruded under the avowed character of neology; divesting Christianity of whatever is above the sphere of human reason, although not contrary to the determinations of that faculty.

4thly. Another point on which our Church gathers strength to her cause from the same quarter, is that of the episcopacy. Be it that the apostolic designation of the three Orders of the ministry may be proved from holy Scripture; still, while scriptural authorities receive plausible interpretations, opposed to what we conceive to be their genuine senses, for the justifying of forms of ecclesiastical government, destitute of example during fifteen hundred years from the beginning of the Christian era, it is of consequence on our part, to avail ourselves of writings in our favor, handed down to us during that long tract of time, including the three earliest centuries. The objection opposed to our theory by the most judicious of the divines who dissent from us, is, that at a certain period, meaning in the latter half of the second century, from which but few documents have descended, the original parity may have been broken down, by there being obtruded on the Church the unknown character, until then, of diocesan episcopacy. Of this plea we make light, when we have to argue that it is mere conjecture; that during the comparatively short term in which parity is alleged to have prevailed, there is not produced an instance of an organized body of presbyters acting independently on the control of episcopacy; and that it is unreasonable to imagine such a change to have taken place, in a Church extending itself in disjointed members over the greater part of the then known world, by simultaneous movements and without opposition; in contrariety to that property in the human character, which never fails to take alarm at the assumption of power, and to throw impediments in the way of the exercise of it. Of this advantage we should deprive the ministry of our Church, if we should reject

the aid of the fathers; not as on a level with Scripture, but as explanatory of it.

5thly. To instance another point, on which there may be derived to our Church similar advantage from the same source. It is the being in possession of a prescribed form of prayer; and the not subjecting of a congregation to the discretion of every officiating minister. For this, besides our Lord's enjoining on his disciples of the form of prayer called by his name, we think we have a warrant in his attendance, and in that of his Apostles, on the devotions of the Temple and of the synagogues. Yet it being contended, that a more spiritual worship was designed to be instituted under the Gospel, and that this is inconsistent with ritual requirements, suited to the imperfect dispensation of the Law, it sustains our cause, that we are able to produce expressions from the three earliest of the centuries, evincing that there were known in the Church what were called "common prayers," and "constituted prayers;" and that there are remains of liturgies, although imperfect and adulterated, of the origin of which no history can be given; a ground of presumption, that the principle which gave occasion to them was in operation from the beginning. We do not allege that there was the same form of sound words obligatory in all Churches. On the contrary, we declare, in the language of our 34th Article—"It is not necessary that traditions and ceremonies be in all places one or utterly like; for at all times they have been diverse, and may be changed according to the diversity of countries, times, and men's manners; so that nothing be ordained against God's word." There was not effected identity of practice in this matter, until, in times far distant from the primitive, it became expedient, for the subjecting of all the Churches of Christendom to one dominant See.

6thly. When we extend our views beyond the bounds of Protestantism, the early fathers afford to us abundant proof of the claim of our Church to be independent on the dictation or the control of an external jurisdiction. However enormous the power, gradually acquired, of a See dominant over the whole of Christendom, there is not the shadow of a claim to it during the first three centuries. In every diocese, its interests were watched over by its own independent authorities; and although Christian communion was maintained of the churches with one another, yet

it was on the ground of a common faith, departure from which was a severance from the body, independently on the control of a prelatical jurisdiction, held to be obligatory on all.

As for general councils, no such bodies were assembled until toward the end of the ages comprehended within this review, when there was held the Council of Nice, under a perfect equality of its members, and with no distinction of any one member in preference to all the others for the sanctioning of its decrees.

These are facts, for which the earliest documents may be appealed to with entire confidence; and although they add nothing to the truth of Scripture, yet, in establishing the sense of it, they cannot be esteemed lightly, without relinquishing the great advantage derived to our Church, by her availing of herself of this help. The only expedient for the wresting of it from us, is by disregarding the distinction between the earlier and the later fathers, contrary to the laws of sound criticism.

Independently on the subjects which have been enumerated, and on which the early ages speak directly in confirmation of the doctrines of our Church, there might be mentioned sundry points, on which their testimonies have bearings incidentally, yet much to our satisfaction. One of these is proof of the perpetuity of the sacraments. It is contended by some, that having had their origin in their conformity to certain Jewish customs, they should be considered as limited to the duration of the Jewish commonwealth. They stand on the broad ground of the unlimited commands—"Baptize all nations," and, "Do this in remembrance of me." Yet, because of the pretence referred to, when, in extending our attention to the age following that of the destruction of Jerusalem, after the sound of the preaching of the Apostles had "gone out into all lands, and their words unto the end of the world," we find that in every organized Church, baptism became the door of admission to a membership of it; and that in the same extent, sacramental communion was the channel of the continuance of profession; divine institution, as to perpetuity, is as conspicuous as in any matter in which the truth of our holy religion is implicated.

There may be traced a similar incidental bearing on Christian doctrine, subversive of what was taught in succeeding ages, of worship to be offered to departed saints, supposed to be in heaven

antecedently to the resurrection. To make way for the assumption of that inferior grade of mediators, it became necessary to put out of view the intermediate state; wherein, although the righteous are in peace, waiting for the consummation of bliss in body and in soul, and the wicked reap as they have sown, they are alike reserved to their respective allotments in the judgment of the great day.

It is a doctrine recognised by our Church in various places; especially in her burial service. In Scripture, we see it in the case of one of the thieves on the cross; in what is said of David by St. Peter, in his address to the Jews on the day of Pentecost; in what we read in the Apocalypse, of the souls under the altar; and, to omit many other places, in those which speak of the second death, to be endured by some, and delivered from by others.

We do not know of any other denominations than our own, who maintain this discrimination as to our states hereafter; but it is prominent in the writings of the fathers, for several ages after the beginning of the Christian era. Independently on innumerable authorities which might be produced, there is sufficient evidence of the point in the commemorations of the early martyrs; the devotions of which contemplated them, not as in heaven, but in a state of bliss, waiting for a joyful resurrection. When we consider, that had the same truth continued to be cherished throughout Christendom, it would have kept the door shut against devotions offered to men and women formerly possessed of like passions with ourselves, it adds to our esteem of the ground taken by our Church—that of a medium between the elevating of the testimonies of the fathers to an equality with holy Scripture; and the not admitting that they may be of use, in the eliciting of its sense.\*

The like bearings might be shown, in reference to the innovated

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\* Some have adopted the notion, that the doctrine of an intermediate state is akin to the tenet of a purgatory. Far from this; the latter was the root from which the contrary doctrine to that advocated was a growth. After the endurance of sufferings by persons purged from the dregs of corruption, it seemed reasonable to admit them to the immediate fruition of God. This projected improvement began in the Council of Florence, about the middle of the 15th century; or at least, was not till then matured. For purgatory, Roman Catholic authors find authority, although of a single writer, as early as toward the end of the sixth century.

points of transubstantiation, purgatory, and a power of pardon vested in the Gospel ministry. The last particular, as held by the early fathers, was imprecatory. In succeeding times it became absolute; being then, as it is now, a source of self-deception to many, in the solemn crisis of departing life.

Brethren—in discoursing of a characteristic of our communion, derived by us from our mother Church of England, we could not but find our feelings interested, in the crisis in which she stands at present; it being big with uncertainty, as to the changes which she is apparently about to undergo, whether they will be for the better or for the worse. We do not take a part in the political controversies of countries exterior to our own; not excepting the country from which we have inherited our religion, our language and our laws. Without our committing of ourselves to the rashness of such an act, it cannot but be permitted to us, on the ground of our common Christianity, to desire the perpetuity and the integrity of a Church, which has long possessed the most conspicuous station among the Churches of Protestant Christendom; and from the pens of whose divines, there have been presented to the world works high in its esteem, on all the branches of theological literature; and which has especial claims on Episcopalians in the United States, because of its aids extended to their communion in its infancy, in various instances; among which is her being the channel through which there has come to us the Bible in the vernacular tongue. We do not obtrude our opinions on the questions which may arise, relative to the internal economy of our mother Church, in matters acted on by discretion, according to existing circumstances. If her institutions, her doctrines being secure, and the essentials of her ministry and of her worship continuing the same, can be improved in the forms of their exhibition; if pecuniary provisions and parochial tenures, perhaps originally wise, have become unsuitable to the altered state of her population; or, should her system be in any way susceptible of improvement, without a shock to the foundation, far be from us the thought of discouraging, or of opposing our opinions to such a design. But when communions at the widest distances from one another, are combining in new acts of a hostility long cherished; and when there is seen a coadjutor to them in an increase of infidelity, radically inimical to the profession of religion in any form; espe-

cially to its being countenanced by national homage to the great Being, of whom it is said in Scripture, that by him "kings reign and princes decree justice;" comprehensive of civil rulers under whatever name; we perceive nothing in our condition as citizens of our confederate commonwealth, which should hinder the giving of expression to our filial feelings, in the putting up of our prayers, through the merits of the adorable Head of the universal Church, for the perpetuity of the Church of England. In such an act of devotion we solicit the concurrence of the clergy and of the laity in all the departments of our Church.

If the dispensations of Providence in reference to our mother Church, should be other than what we wish and pray for, that perseverance in her principles in these States may be perpetual, will still be an object of our concern. It is a blessing which will attend her, in proportion as her members, especially her clergy, shall cultivate in their own persons, in their families, and in their ecclesiastical agencies, the rational and evangelical devotion which her institutions are so well adapted to excite and to cultivate. That there may be this result, we now lift our hearts in prayer to the great Being, "from whom all holy desires, all good counsels and all just works proceed."

Signed, by order of the House of Bishops,

WILLIAM WHITE,

*Presiding Bishop.*









